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SUBJECT: NEPAL'S CABINET TO MEET ON EVEREST

Summary

1. (U) Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and 24 Cabinet ministers are scheduled to meet at the foot of Mount Everest on December 4 in an effort to draw the world's attention to the adverse impact of global warming on the Himalayas. The Government of Nepal (GON) is calling for urgent international cooperation and assistance to address the affects of climate change on the Himalayas, including the formation of glacial lakes that are in danger of bursting. To further highlight the plight of the Himalayas, the GON has invited all climbers who have summited Mount Everest to a Summiteers' Summit that will be held in conjunction with the upcoming United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference in Copenhagen.

Cabinet Meets at the Top of World

2. (U) Seeking to draw attention to the increasingly adverse impact of climate change on the Himalayas, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal and 24 Cabinet ministers are scheduled to meet at the foot of Mount Everest on December 4. The Cabinet scheduled the unprecedented meeting after its counterpart in the Maldives generated extensive worldwide media coverage when it held an underwater meeting in October to underscore the impact of global warming on the island nation. The meeting will be held in an area known as Kalapathar, elevation 17,220 feet, and is expected to last just 20 minutes due to extreme conditions.

3. (U) The Prime Minister and his Cabinet will be accompanied by five members of Cabinet Secretariat, including the Chief Secretary, and more than 50 members of the national and international media. Twenty-five Sherpa summiteers, officials from the National Trust for Nature Conservation, and members of the Himalayan Rescue Association are also expected to be part of the entourage, which began arriving in the region on Thursday to acclimate to the altitude. Only 40 people are expected to travel to the meeting site -- PM Nepal, Cabinet ministers, members of the Secretariat and select media representatives. A press conference is scheduled to be held in nearby Syangboche following the meeting, which is being held in advance of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference in Copenhagen, beginning December 7.

4. (U) The Cabinet is expected to address two issues during the meeting: the message PM Nepal will deliver during the three minutes he has been allotted to speak at the UNFCCC conference and how to garner international support to mitigate the affects of global warming on the Himalayas. The GON also plans to announce the creation of the Gaurishanker Conservation Area, a 2,000-square-kilometer preserve west of Mount Everest. (Note. Nepal is a regional leader in biodiversity conservation, with almost a fifth of its land

mass already part of a national park, nature reserve or some other conservation system. End note)

Everest Summiteers to March in Copenhagen

15. (U) The GON, under the leadership of Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation Dipak Bohra, is organizing a Summiteers' Summit during the UNFCCC conference to draw further attention to the plight of the Himalayas. The event will be held on December 11, International Mountain Day, and all climbers who have summited Mount Everest have been invited to attend. Apa Sherpa, who has summited Everest a record 19 times, will lead a march in which renowned climbers from the United States, Japan, France, Italy, and many others countries are expected to join him. PM Nepal also plans to host a dinner in honor of Everest summiteers.

Himalayas Already Hard Hit by Climate Change

16. (U) Climate change has already had a huge impact on the Himalayas, where temperatures have risen at a rate of nearly 1 degree Celsius per decade since routine monitoring was established about 30 years ago. Glaciers are melting at an accelerated rate -- the UN's special International Panel of Climate Change warns that they could disappear by 2035 -- resulting the formation of huge glacial lakes that are in danger of bursting and causing massive destruction of life and property downstream. Experts have identified 30 lakes on the brink of creating glacial lake outburst floods, also known as "mountain tsunamis."

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17. (U) Warmer temperatures have also been blamed for decreased snowfall in the Himalayas, whose rivers are largely fed by melting snow. As a result, there is a growing threat to the more than 500 million people in South Asia who depend on these rivers as a water source. Additionally, climate change has had an adverse impact on the region's seasonal monsoon, which, in recent years, has grown weaker and more erratic. Agricultural production is largely dependent on the monsoon. In Nepal, for example, more than 70 percent of farmers depend on monsoon rains to irrigate their crops.

Comment

18. (U) The Cabinet meeting on Mount Everest is likely to generate as much, if not more, global attention than the Maldives' underwater meeting. What is uncertain is whether Nepal will be able to sustain that attention and parlay it into support in Copenhagen, where it will join other G-77 developing nations in pressing industrialized nations for significant resources to adapt to climate change, including the free transfer of technology needed to attain carbon neutrality. With the other G-77 nations, Nepal will be demanding that industrialized countries adhere to the strict emission targets established by the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Nepali officials have privately said that rapidly developing countries, such as India and China, should also agree to strict targets, but it is unlikely they will express this publicly in Copenhagen.

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